

Furore over Brechin minister 'biggest crisis' in over 150 years Clergyman claims gay appointment will horrify people

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A ROW over whether a gay minister should be appointed to a north-east church represents the biggest "crisis" facing the Church of Scotland in over 150 years, a minister warned last night.

The Rev Ian Watson of evangelical organisation Forward Together said the decision to instal Scott Rennie at Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen had horrified people across Scotland.

He claimed people would be driven away because it flew in the face of what they believed in.

Mr Watson said presbyteries across Scotland voted 36-9 not to bless civil partnerships in 2006 and argued that the 12 ministers in Aberdeen who are attempting to block the 36-year-old appointment represent the majority of members.

Aberdeen Presbytery members – who include the ministers Louis Kinsey of St Columba's at Bridge of Don, Peter Dickson of High Holburn, Hugh Wallace of Newhills and Nigel Parker of Bucksburn Stoneywood – are calling for Mr Rennie's appointment to be blocked because they do not approve of his lifestyle.

Some of them are members of Forward Together, which is part of the Kirk.

Aberdeen Presbytery voted 60-24 in favour of appointing Mr Rennie on January 6.

Professor Trevor Salmon, Queen's Cross joint session clerk, said members, office-bearers and Mr Rennie are "dismayed" by the protest and branded the dissenters "small-minded".

If the appeal is upheld by a Kirk committee it will be referred to the General Assembly of the Kirk in May for discussion.

Mr Watson, a minister in Kirkmuirhill, South Lanarkshire, said he hoped this would happen as the decision is too "momentous" for one presbytery to make.

"This is the biggest crisis facing the Church since 1843 when the disruption happened," he added.

"This could sink the Church because people are talking about leaving if Mr Rennie's adoption is sustained.

"People have steam coming out of their ears.

"They are mad and upset because it goes against everything that they believe in."

Mr Rennie is currently minister at Brechin Cathedral and is regarded as one of Scotland's finest young preachers.

Born and educated in Aberdeen, he is separated from his wife, with whom he has a young daughter, and shares the manse with another man.

Mr Watson said Forward Together believes that homosexual practice is contrary to the bible's teaching.

“Ministers take a vow to lead a holy and godly life which implies observing a biblical morality including sexual relationships,” he added.

“We believe in sex within marriage and abstinence outwith marriage whether you are gay or not.”